



BUZZ BOX The Vines

It's a fine example of messed-up when the anal-retentive glories of product categorization can be applied to something as dirt-under-fingernails sloppy as garage rock. But here we are. The "Garage Rock 2002" spice rack is filled with neat little bottles labeled "Strokes," "Hives," "White Stripes," and "The Mooney Suzuki"—flavors that share chord forms and energy, but that also veer off into singular traits of kick, style, and swagger. Australia's Vines will likely be set upon the same rack. Don't fall for it. Sure they're young and cute and rock hard, but listen for the striking countermelodies, interlocking riffs, lush and nasty signal processing, and stylistic flights of fancy.

"The Vines is about a lot of different songs, and it's very musical and spiritual and serious and mature and childish," says guitarist and songwriter Craig Nicholls. "It's a combination of control and freedom, and we let the songs dictate everything. We're not trying to sell a particular sound. In fact, we don't really have a sound."

Nicholls is so set on the band's compositional artistry that he rebuffs detailed queries about gear. "My setup is big, basic, and simple," he offers. "I have a Strat, a Marshall half-stack, and 'secret' chorus and distortion pedals. No big deal. We didn't become better players because we were seeking good sounds or technique. We got better the more we played, and we played so much because we were totally involved with the *songs*."

The Vines' collective creative mindset was kicked into

gear through guitar bands such as the Kinks, the Beatles, Suede, Supergrass, and the Dandy Warhols, and Nicholls is dead serious about form and structure. But he also opens himself to influences from nature and whimsical ideas such as "playing the guitar is like flying."

"It's not about the gear," says Nicholls, "it's what you do with it."

"I'm totally obsessed by art," he admits. "This isn't sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Songs are sacred to us. What we do sounds like classical music to me, except that we're playing electric guitars instead of violins." —MICHAEL MOLEND

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